

## Message Text

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PAGE 01 MONTRE 01067 022044Z

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7818  
INFO AMEMBASSY OTTAWA

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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: DEFECTION SOVIET ATHLETE

MONTREAL PRESS AND OTHER NEWS MEDIA HAVE GIVEN WIDE COVERAGE TO REQUEST FOR ASYLUM BY SOVIET OLYMPIC DIVER SERGEI NEMTSANOV. THE GAZETTE OF JULY 31, IN ITS OWN ARTICLE REPRESENTATIVE OF OTHER MONTREAL PRESS COVERAGE, REPORTED SMIRNOV, VICE PRESIDENT OF USSR NATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE, AS SAYING SOVIET DELEGATION CONSIDERED THIS AS "KIDNAPPING OF A SOVIET ATHLETE" AND BLAMING HIS DISAPPEARANCE ON LAX SECURITY. SMIRNOV, SAID THE GAZETTE, CALLED IT "ORCHESTRATED ANTI-SOVIET CAMPAIGN" AND "PLANNED PROVOCATION AGAINST THE SOVIET DELEGATION". THE GAZETTE EMPHASIZED THE EFFECT THE SOVIET THREAT MIGHT HAVE ON THE ON-GOING CANADA-USSR ICE HOCKEY SERIES. IN A SIMILAR ARTICLE, LE DEVOIR OF JULY 31 SAID USSR EMBASSY IN OTTAWA HAD SENT DIPLOMATIC NOTE TO EXTAFF DEMANDING IMMEDIATE RETURN OF NEMTSANOV AND ADDED SOVIET AMBASSADOR HAD SAID IT ILLEGAL FOR CANADA TO GRANT HIM "ASYLUM- BECAUSE HE IS A MINOR."

2. LA DEVOIR OF AUGUST 2, IN ARTICLE ON NEMTSANOV AND FOUR ROMANIAN DEFECTORS, SAID IT SEEMED POLITICS HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THE RUSSIAN DIVER'S DECISION. LA DEVOIR SAID HE DID IT BECAUSE OF A LOVE AFFAIR WITH A RICH AMERICAN GIRL HE MET IN CANADA LAST YEAR DURING SPORTING COMPETITIONS.

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PAGE 02 MONTRE 01067 022044Z

EM IN ITS LEAD EDITORIAL OF AUGUST 2 ON THE OLYMPICS IN GENERAL, LE DEVOIR SAYS THE SOVIET THREAT TO WITHDRAW FROM THE FINAL OLYMPICS EVENTS SHOWS THAT POLITICS ARE NEVER ABSENT WHEN REPRESENTATIVES OF SEVERAL COUNTRIES GET TOGETHER FOR WHATEVER PURPOSE. IN LENGTHY ARTICLE BY EDITORIAL WRITER IN SAME ISSUE, LA DEVOIR SAYS "SOVIET SCENARIO" RESPECTING NEMTSANOV SHOWS CLEARLY THE KIND OF MESS THE INTERNATIONAL OLYMPIC COMMITTEE HAS GOTTEN INTO BY AWARDING THE 1980 GAMES TO MOSCOW. RUSSIA BLUNDERED IN MENACING CANADA BY PRESSURING THE IOC. IT PROVED THAT THE GAMES, FOR MOSCOW, ARE A POLITICAL AFFAIR. IT IS WRONG TO THINK THAT A PRESUMABLE NONPOLITICAL SUPERSPECTACLE CAN BE HELD IN A COUNTRY WHERE SPORTING FEATS ARE LOOKED ON AS PROOF OF EXCELLENCE OF POLITICAL SYSTEM. SOVIETS MADE ERROR IN THEIR HANDLING OF THIS SITUATION, LA DEVOIR ADDS, BUT IT RAISES THE QUESTION WHETHER THIS MIGHT NOT BE A TEST FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF THE NEXT OLYMPICS. IT MAY BE THAT MOSCOW HAS DISCOVERED A LITTLE LATE THE GREAT CHALLENGE ATTACHED TO THEIR HOLDING THE GAMES IN MOSCOW. THERE PROBABLY WON'T BE ANY DEFECTORS "NOT EVEN ROMAINIANS", BUT THERE WILL BE NEWSMEN AND TOURISTS AS WELL AS "GLIB-TONGUED MONIQUE BERLIOUX TYPES", DISSIDENT AND MINORITY GROUP REPRESENTATIVES, WHO WILL NOT BE CONTENT WITH QUIETLY WATCHING THE GAMES. WILL THE RUSSIANS LEARN TO LIVE WITH THIS? WILL THEY ROUND UP THEIR OWN POSSIBLE TROUBLE-MAKERS AND HERD THEM INTO AN "OLYMPIC GULAT"? IF MOSCOW WANTS TO WITHDRAW FROM THE 1980 GAMES, THERE IS STILL TIME TO DO SO. ITS SPORTS LEADERS DID NOT SHOW UP WELL IN MONTREAL. HARPER

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